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ON PAGE A-1

Offices for CIA spook Reston

By **ADRIAN HIGGINS**
Journal staff writer

When Robert E. Simon, the founder of Reston, envisioned his Utopian city in western Fairfax County he apparently didn't figure on a major spy center in the heart of the planned community.

Nor did Reston residents, who are anxious about new plans by the Central Intelligence Agency to occupy a large-scale office complex under construction in what will eventually be Reston's bustling town center.

"It's going to be a major CIA facility; it's going to be an alternative to Langley," said Reston activist Joseph Stowers, who was among a delegation of civic leaders meeting with the agency Wednesday to voice concerns about the plan.

The developers building the Reston Town Center office project, off Reston Avenue between Sunset Hills Road and the Washington & Old Dominion Railroad trail, refused to comment on the plans, except to say the first two buildings, which are already built, contain 250,000 square feet of space.

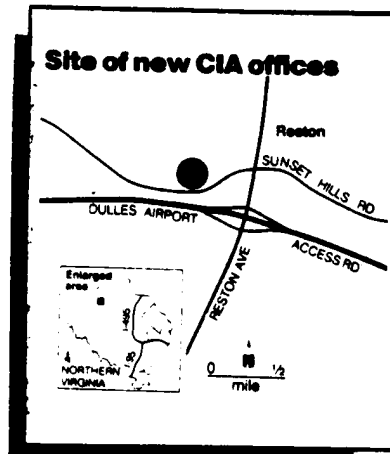
Residents have a number of concerns about the project, including the need for a security fence around the facility in an otherwise airy, open community of lakes and parkways, and about the agency's plans to rebuild an existing, unwanted microwave communications tower about half a mile from the site at Fox Mill Road.

Reston and Fairfax County officials are puzzled over the CIA's decision to occupy buildings next to the location of the future Reston Town Center, an 85-acre complex of stores, pedestrian plazas, hotels and homes on the other side of the railroad trail under development by Reston's major landowner, the Reston Land Corp. Fairfax County Board Vice Chairman Martha V. Pennino,

whose Centreville District encompasses Reston, said one of her concerns is that the complex might become a target for terrorist attack.

CIA spokeswoman Sharon Foster said it is policy only to acknowledge the existence of the agency's Langley headquarters and its offices in the Ames Building in Rosslyn. "We have been subject to threats against buildings and the people in them from terrorists and whacko people. We just don't divulge them," she said.

Pennino and Stowers met with a representative of Mulligan-Griffin & Associates Inc., the Rockville-based developers building the offices, as well as an official with the intelligence-gathering agency.



Dave Clark/Journal

Stowers said the man identified himself as a CIA employee. "The guy didn't give his card and I didn't ask his name. When I mentioned the newspapers at one point, he cringed."

Pennino said she tried to convince the CIA to find a more isolated site for the complex. "Why did they place themselves where we are trying to encourage people to come and carry on all kinds of activities in the town center, which will have concerts and theaters?" she said. "They claim they gave it thought and that's not going to be a problem. They want their employees to come out and mingle with the townfolk."

"The need for additional microwave towers and the privacy they need is somewhat in conflict with our concept of Reston," said Reston Community Association president Janet Howell.

Reston civic leaders, who enjoy protections from unsuitable fences and structures in the planned community, are worried the CIA will erect chain-link fencing and barbed wire around the complex. Participants in Wednesday's meeting said the agency is flexible on the perimeter design, and may erect wrought-iron railings similar to those around the White House.

Pennino said she suggested as an alternative site for the communications tower the nearby U.S. Geological Survey complex, and was told "they'll give it thought."

The agency's expansion to Reston comes at the same time the CIA is enlarging its headquarters at Langley. The agency is constructing a new building at the site, which reportedly will house another 3,000 CIA employees.

Reston residents say they haven't been told which operations the CIA is planning for their community. "Ask Mr. Reagan," quipped Howell.